

WHEN IT'S APPLE BUTTER TIME in Allentown

By THERESE MYERS



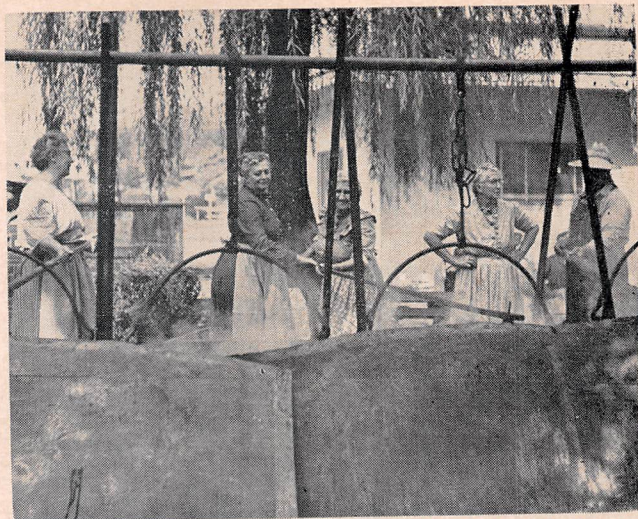
Apple "Shnitzing" by hand and "Shnitzer". Young and old join in the activity. (Foto Therese Myers)

It has often been said that "Monday's apples make Tuesday's cider for Wednesday's apple butter. Apple butter is a favorite dish of the Pennsylvania Dutch (they call it "Lodwarick") and the making of apple butter is an occasion for having fun, as well as doing work. The custom of apple butter parties was probably brought here by the early German settlers back in the eighteenth century who emigrated to Pennsylvania from the Palatinate — a fertile region bordering on the Rhine. At one time these parties were as popular as husking bees, quilting parties, barn raisings, and other such activities. Like so many other customs, however, they disappeared with the development of the machine age, although in some sections people continued to make apple butter in the traditional manner. In 1938, William S. Troxell — better known as "Pumpnickle Bill" — initiated the "Dutch Schnitzing and Apple Butter Festival" at Allentown, Pennsylvania, as a deliberate effort to preserve some of the Pennsylvania Dutch folk ways. Every year since then, some seventy-five to a hundred friendly and industrious people — members of nearby clubs and granges — have been demonstrating to visitors at Dorney Park the traditional Pennsylvania Dutch way of making apple butter. The festival has also inspired a revival of apple butter parties among the people themselves, some of whom still recall having to hunt in the woods for sassafras root as children. Sassafras is one of the ingredients used to season the apple butter.

The Pennsylvania Dutch do not have to go far for their apples, since they own some of the largest and best kept farms orchards in the country. It is a delightful experience to ride through that section — in the southeastern part of Pennsylvania — and see miles and miles of lush green fields and orchards. You might even find yourself brushing up against branches of trees bending low with the weight of the fruit, or you might be lucky enough to have some of them drop right at your feet. And while driving along the back roads of Churchtown, Bird-in-Hand, or any of the other neighboring towns, you are sure to pass some of the beautifully decorated barns for which the Pennsylvania Dutch are famous. These decorations are often referred to as "hex signs", but most experts deny that there is any superstition attached to them — they are "chust for nice".

Almost every variety of apple is grown in these orchards, but it is believed that "Maiden Blush" or "Summer Rambo" make the best apple butter.

The two-day demonstration at Allentown's Dorney Park, which is held during the Labor Day week-end, is accompanied by singing, dancing, and story-telling. It begins at



A "talka" of apple churners, Pennsylvania Dutch Frauen exchange views. (Foto Therese Myers).

midday on Sunday with the washing, peeling, coring and "schnitzing" (cutting into quarters) of the apples. About 200 gallons of cider have already been prepared and stored away for the actual cooking on the following day; but a good portion of the delicious liquid is being used for drinking purposes.

On the first day of the "schnitzing party" a number of men and women, as well as some teen-agers, are seated in little groups attending to their respective chores. Some are peeling the apples — either with a knife, or with a little metal machine which neatly strips off the skin as a handle is turned — while others are "schnitzing" the peeled apples. By the end of the day, some thirty bushels of "schnitz" are ready to be cooked.

The women and girls are dressed in the traditional Pennsylvania Dutch costumes, some of which have been handed down from generation to generation. They consist of long cotton dresses, usually of some gay-colored printed or checked design, with high necks and long sleeves, aprons, and some with bonnets. The men are dressed in simple farmer overalls of blue denim, white shirts, and straw hats of various styles. Red kerchiefs are seen protruding from pockets, tied around necks, or mopping wet brows.

A few of the men are cleaning and polishing the large copper cauldrons (the "Lodwarick Kessels") in which the apple butter is to be cooked, gathering fuel for the fires, and doing various other chores.

In another section, some women are setting a large table at which the workers will partake of their picnic supper. Each family has prepared some special dish for the entire group. Large containers of potato salad, vegetable relish (chow-chow), tomato preserve and other sweets and soups, as well as other delectable cold dishes, are already on the table, and cooks are busily engaged at the stove preparing such hot dishes as pork and sauerkraut, roast beef, turkey, mashed potatoes (as only the Pennsylvania Dutch can make them), beans, corn, and other vegetables. Of course, there are all kinds of pies. Needless to say, almost everything is home-grown and home-made.

In the midst of all this activity, "Pumpnickle Bill", a tall, genial-looking man in overalls, is seen scurrying about, supervising little details, answering questions and making announcements to visitors over the microphone. Pumpnickle's interest in keeping alive this pleasant custom is in line with his interest in Pennsylvania Dutch folklore in general. In addition to these activities, he



The "Jungwarg" churns while the apple butter simmers in the huge "Kessels". Pumpnickle Bill (William S. Troxell), instigator of the Apple Butter festivals, passes his final verdict: "Ja gawiss, der lodwarick is gute." (Foto Therese Myers).

writes a folksy type of column for the Allentown Morning Call and has his own radio program.

Throughout the day, there is much good-humored bantering back and forth, and even some romancing. The kids are also busy — either doing some of the simple chores, or playing practical jokes on their parents, such as tying balloons on mother's apron strings or daddy's suspenders. Occasionally a parent is heard to exclaim: "shtop, duh glainer honswesht, Ich hof ganunk!" (A "glainer honswersht" is a mischievous youngster; "ganung" means "enough").

The Pennsylvania Dutch dialect — which is derived from the low (platt) German dialect brought here from the Rhineland by the early pioneers, and which developed into the present dialect through a cultural interchange with their English neighbors — is one of the few things which binds together the "Plain People" and "The Gay Ones".

The Pennsylvania Dutch participants in the "schnitzing party" belong to the group known as the "Gay Dutch". There are many more Gay Dutch than there are Plain Ones. The former are members of standard Protestant groups — mostly Lutheran and Reformed — and go along with the world as it develops, while the Amish, Mennonites, Dunkers and other Plain Dutch — plain in their way of life, as well as in their mode of dress — resist, as much as possible, contact with the outside world. Most of them do not own or drive automobiles, have no electricity, television, or radios in their homes, wear no jewelry or other ornaments. Even buttons are considered too worldly by some; they use hooks and eyes instead. The Gay Dutch are the main preservers of what is generally known as Pennsylvania Dutch culture. Most of this culture can be traced to Germany, although there were some Swiss and French Huguenots among the early settlers, too. The term "Dutch" incidentally, refers not to Holland, but to the eighteenth century use of the word (Deutsch) by the colonies and England. At that time the term was synonymous with "German".

The second day of the festival begins at 5:00 o'clock in the morning. Not everyone is needed at that hour, but most of the men are on hand to start things rolling, since it takes eight hours for the making of the apple butter. A few of the women can also be seen fussing around the stove — either getting together some breakfast for the early-risers or making some advance preparations for the mid-day meal. The Lodwarick Kessels are attached, with chains, to a heavy iron rod from which they are suspended,

and fires are started under each one. When the fire is just right, the cider is poured into the kettles. As soon as this liquid begins to boil, the "Schnitz" are added, a little at a time. From the moment the apples are poured in, the mixture is stirred continuously with long, wooden paddles; for this stirring mustn't stop, otherwise the thickening liquid will stick to the kettle. Back and forth, round and round go the paddles, and the workers sway back and forth along with them. It is not an easy task, particularly on a hot day, for the fires are also hot and smoky, and the arms get tired. But the stirrers relieve each other frequently by switching activities, and occasionally they take time out for a square dance. Sometimes two people will stir the butter with one paddle. If the two happen to be a man and a woman (who are not husband and wife) they are very likely in for a bit of teasing. Once, a female visitor offered to relieve one of the stirrers for a while. One of the men showed her how to manipulate the paddle, and while they stood there working together, "Pumpnickle" came over. He stood watching for a minute, then called one of his colleagues over. "Hey, was gait aw doh?" (Hey, what goes on here?) "N leddich maid'l un 'n wiðmon". (A single girl and a widower)... "Ummmm... Ahemmmmmmm" (and it looked as though apple butter was not the only thing being cooked up).

The square dances, which are done at intervals throughout the afternoon and evening, are not much different from those done in other parts of the East, except that they do a great deal of clogging, or jigging, between the figures. This is probably the mark of the Irish — a hang-over from the days of the early railroad builders. The dance figures are prompt-called (as distinguished from patter and singing-calls) and occasionally the ere called in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, or partly in the dialect. When the direction, "Hee hay" was given by a caller, the group responded with what is known to the rest of the square dance world as "circle left". An experienced square dancer, even if he couldn't understand a word of what was being called, would quickly recognize such figures as "Lady Around the Lady", "Grapevine Twist" and "Duck for the Oyster". The Virginia Reel (which came to this country as the English "Sir Roger de Coverly") is also a favorite of both teenagers and older folks.

Although the dancing is done by the apple butter makers for their own enjoyment, so many people stop to watch that it almost takes on the character of a performance. There is no self-consciousness on the part of the dancers, however; the accent is on having fun. Occasionally there will be a visiting square dance team as part of the evening's entertainment. Most of the popular dance teams achieve their reputation by their ability at jigging, or hoe-downing, as it is sometimes called. Strangely enough, there are no German folk dances in the Pennsylvania Dutch culture, although once in a while the "Schuhplattler" will be featured at one of their festivals.

At the beginning of the eighth hour, the activity increases around the Lodwarick Kessels. Sugar is added, then the spices — usually cinnamon, cloves and sassafras. By this time, hundreds of people have gathered to watch the final proceeding and to sample the finished product. Many of them will want to buy some in jars to take home. Excitement begins to mount as the spicy odor permeates the air and tickles the nostrils. Specimens of apple butter are taken from the various kettles and much guessing takes place as to which cauldron will be finished first. Maybe that one didn't have enough schnitz, or the fire wasn't just so; maybe the other one had better stirrers.

When it is decided which cauldron is just right, according to taste and proper consistency, the pungent brown substance is ladled into pails, then poured into gallon crocks which have, in the meantime, been placed in